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2010 FEB 12 AM 9: 30

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Cathy Noh

From: Cathy Noh [cathy.noh@saylorcompany.com]
Sent: Friday, February 05, 2010 10:05 AM
Subject: Issues Points Memo-Coverage of South Ossetian petition to U.S. Senator Lugar, opposing Georgian re-arming
Attachments: image001.gif

We thought you might find this article of interest.

Best regards,

Steve

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The New York Times

South Ossetians Warn Against Rearming Georgia

By ELLEN BARRY

February 5, 2010

MOSCOW — Residents of South Ossetia, the tiny separatist enclave at the center of the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, petitioned United States Senator Richard G. Lugar on Thursday to warn against supplying the Georgian government with weapons, saying they could be used against civilians.

The petition is a response to a staff report released in late December by Mr. Lugar's office, which calls into question Washington's decision to stop providing weapons to Georgia after its brief war with Russia. The report, titled "Striking the Balance: U.S. Policy and Stability in Georgia," says that the policy has left Georgia "under a de facto arms embargo" that contributes to regional instability.

The report stops short of recommending the resumption of arms supplies, but highlights the quandary Washington has faced for 18 months, as it seeks to improve its relationship with Moscow without abandoning a commitment to help Georgia join NATO, a process that involves upgrading its military. Under current conditions, the report says, "Georgia will not only have difficulty providing for its own territorial defense needs, but remain susceptible to the internal strife and external manipulation that often accompany such national insecurity."

About 340 residents of South Ossetia signed the petition, which was forwarded Thursday by South Ossetia's American public relations firm.

Referring to the Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili, the petition reads, "The citizens of South Ossetia fear that President Saakashvili, in light of his past recklessness and erratic behavior, will again use any military weapons and training against us." The document goes on to request that Congress hold hearings on how American aid was used in the August 2008 war.

Andy Fisher, a spokesman for Senator Lugar, an Indiana Republican, had no comment on the petition, but noted that the Obama administration had made no changes to the policy on military aid to Georgia established under President Bush.

South Ossetia, a mountainous area the size of Rhode Island, had been seeking independence from Georgia since the breakup of the Soviet Union. In recent years, Moscow increased support for the separatists, and when Mr. Saakashvili ordered an attack on the South Ossetian capital, Russia sent its army to drive out Georgian forces. Moscow went on to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia, another breakaway territory in Georgia, as sovereign nations.

After the war, the United States provided Georgia with \$1 billion in aid, but cut off all financing to the Georgian Ministry of Defense, stopped providing weapons and training Georgian special forces, and deflected Georgian inquiries about antitank and air defense systems, the report from Mr. Lugar's office said. Military sales, which grew from \$10.5 million in 2006 to \$25 million in 2007 to \$72.3 million in 2008, dropped to zero in 2009.

Last August, United States forces began training 730 Georgian soldiers to serve in Afghanistan, but all weapons used in the training must be taken out of Georgia once training is completed, the report said.

Alexander Rondeli, president of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, said he did not expect the United States to change its policy on military aid soon.

"Georgia now is in a very difficult situation because Russia has put pressure on everyone, and we can't even buy cartridges," he said, adding that the staff report from Mr. Lugar's office was "a bright spot on a quite dark horizon."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/05/world/europe/05russia.html>

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